
How the UPR Works for Non-governmental Organisations*

Background

The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) made six submissions to the UPR process in 2008. The submissions focused on countries where the CHRI has ongoing projects, where it has sufficient secondary data to prepare reports and where there are constraints on other CSO partners in making submissions to the Human Rights Council.

The information used for the CHRI submissions was gathered through programmes organised in conjunction with national and community level CSOs, from monitoring the news for human rights concerns and from the CHRI's own human rights related analysis undertaken on a thematic basis. The information pooled from these sources was combined to identify important and outstanding human rights issues and concerns which were then verified in consultation with partner organisations.

Experience of the UPR process

The CHRI is supportive of CSOs holding joint consultative meetings and encourages CSOs to arrive at one consolidated submission to transmit to the HRC. This approach encourages consensus on human rights issues, thus avoiding duplication of information and multiple submissions to the OHCHR. The CHRI participated in two such consultations – in India and Ghana.

As called for in Resolution 5/1, the CHRI would like to emphasise the need for and value of states conducting national consultations with stakeholders, including CSOs, when preparing for their national report. CSOs could be of great assistance and may be able to make focused submissions if national consultations are held in advance.

The CHRI calls upon states to follow a planned and transparent process when they are preparing their reports; this helps CSOs to assist in and contribute to a state's national report. Further, as the preparatory stage to UPR is often intense and spread across different ministerial departments, appointing a designated focal person within government helps CSOs in approaching the correct channels when preparing reports and during the follow-up of the recommendations.

*From the perspective of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative.
Contributed by Uttara Sahani and Iniyana Ilango.

A challenge faced by the CHRI when drafting its submissions relates to the fact that the CHRI's work mainly relates to civil and political rights, whereas the spectrum of human rights is much wider. To ensure that the most pertinent human rights issues – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – are addressed, priority was given to the issues that received most emphasis in the CSO consultations, issues raised by countries in their pledges to the HRC and issues surfacing in the national media as being of national importance.

The CHRI calls upon states to follow a planned and transparent process when they are preparing their reports.

Recommendations

Following its experience from the first year of the UPR, the CHRI would like to make the following recommendations:

- Commonwealth governments should follow and publish a well-defined timeline for a dedicated, transparent and inclusive consultative process. Co-ordination of the UPR process is essential so that both states and CSOs work in good faith on the preparation of balanced and focused reports.
- Commonwealth governments should streamline their internal processes governing the UPR process. Given the commonalities in institutional and administrative systems, Commonwealth governments could work together to evolve Commonwealth best practices in the area of the UPR.
- Commonwealth governments should keep an up-to-date directory containing contact details of government officials and departments in charge of UPR processes. This will assist both government channels and Commonwealth CSOs in accessing information and in sharing experiences and best practice.
- Commonwealth governments should hold early CSO consultations before the CSO's own UPR submission deadlines. It is suggested that such consultations should not be a one-off event, but rather a continuous process. This would help CSOs in understanding the UPR process and the government's plans and processes in the UPR preparatory work.
- Commonwealth CSOs should assist in the formulation of model guidelines and best practices for approaching the UPR. The CHRI sees the Commonwealth Model National Plan of Action on Human Rights⁴ as complementary to this process and strongly encourages its use.



Delegates at the UPR seminar for Commonwealth Caribbean countries, Barbados, October 2008.